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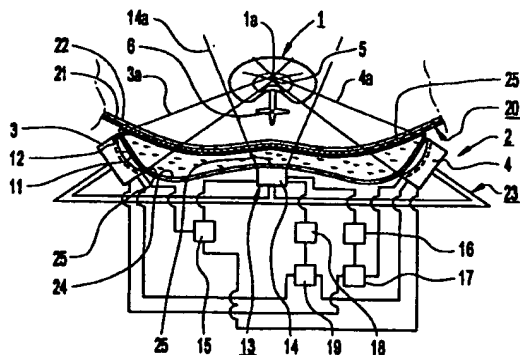
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(54) Device for non-invasive treatment of biological tissue

(57) The present invention relates to a device for non-invasive treatment of biological tissue, whereby the treatment aim at changing or degenerating said tissue. This device has a treatment transducer (2) comprising at least one ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) which is provided to treat intervertebral discs (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a), by means of ultrasound, whereby the ultrasonic field of the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) is focused in said intervertebral disc (1), preferably in nucleus pulposus (1a), for heating the tissue therein, to such temperatures that the tissue in the focal area (5) degenerates, whereby the pressure in the intervertebral disc (1) and thus, the pressure against the spinal cord (6) is reduced.

Fig. 1



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Description

The present invention relates to a device for non-invasive treatment of biological tissue, whereby the treatment aim at changing or degenerating said tissue.

The lifetime prevalence of sciatica is 40 percent and 1-2 percent of the population will develop nerve compression by a lumbar disc herniation requiring invasive (surgical) treatment, usually during the fourth and fifth decades of life. Surgical removal of discal hernia, discectomy, has been performed for almost seven decades. The diagnostic procedures going from myelography using oil to nonionic contrastmedia over to computerized tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) has led to a rapid increase of the number of spinal operations based on diversity of surgical procedures.

There are four necessary prerequisites for intervention of disc herniation: a/ functionally incapacitating pain in the leg extending below the knee with a nerve root distribution, b/ nerve root tension signs with or without neurological abnormalities, c/ failure of clinical improvement after four to eight weeks, d/ diagnostic confirmation (e.g. through imaging study).

The introduction of non-surgical or minimal invasive surgical procedures started 1964 with chymopapain and chemonucleolysis which brought about the era of percutaneous treatment for herniated discs. The clinical success of chymopapain with good results in 60-75 percent led to an extensive use. Unfortunately, it had an anapylaxis rate estimated to be about 1 percent. The enzyme polymerizes the long chains of proteoglycans in the nucleus pulposus with subsequent loss or water binding capacity. This causes reduction in the volume and pressure of the nucleus and the herniated fragment, eventually explaining the immediate relief of sciatica in patients following chemonucleolysis. Most authors agree that relief of leg pain after chymopapain is less frequent than after surgery. Several new methods using percutaneous techniques have evolved since 1975, using endoscopic equipment and recently also non-endoscopic technique with an automated percutaneous suction of tissue by means of a probe. Recently, laser (electromagnetic) radiation created by external stimulation of a laser medium, has been used. For directing the laser radiation to the treatment area however, a probe is required, i.e. the method is invasive.

All these methods are to a certain extent invasive (require surgical operations) and problems such as disc infection and nerve root injury are encountered although less frequently than after open surgery.

The intervertebral disc is comparable to other non-vascularized biological tissue. It has a central nucleus pulposus with a gelatinous character and a surrounding stiffer annulus. The matrix in the disc includes several proteins with different rates of turn over and energy demand.

There is today no non-invasive treatment that will

affect the disc in such a manner that it will reduce its volume and pressure in the nucleus and thereby possibly diminish a discal hernia.

Attempts to achieve tissue degeneration with high intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) have been going on for several years in cancer research projects (Bush 1993, Billard 1990, Lele 1980, Linke 1973, Sibille 1993). The advantage of ultrasound as a generator of energy, compared to e.g. electromagnetic fields, is that ultrasound is a non-invasive method to generate tissue heating at depths. Focusing of the ultrasound and placing the focus inside the tissue to be treated, makes the heating effect to develop at the desired location instead of at the skin and the tissue in between (Lele 1980). If the transducer surface is spherical, the transducer has a fixed focus (Lele 1980). It is also possible to achieve a flexible focus by means of phased array (Diederich 1991, Ebbini 1988, Ebbini 1991 and Holmer 1987).

Prior art also includes a number of patent specifications relating to methods and devices wherein ultrasound is utilized for various therapeutic purposes without any type of surgical operations on the patient. One such patent specification is US-A-5 435 311 relating to an "ultrasound therapeutic system" for treatment of e.g. malignant tumours or various types of calculi such as gallstone, kidney stone, etc.. The device of US-A-4 787 394 relating to an "ultrasound therapy apparatus", has a similar purpose.

Other devices and methods utilizing ultrasound for a corresponding therapeutic purpose, are described in e.g. US-A-5 327 884 and US-A-5 501 655.

Similar tissue degeneration as with ultrasound can also be made with other methods, such as percutaneous laser discectomy and percutaneous radio-frequency coagulation by means of cauterizing instruments (Buchalt 1992, Troussier 1995), but these methods are invasive.

The object of the present invention has been to provide a device for non-invasive treatment of back problems. This is arrived at according to the invention by providing the initially defined device with the characterizing features of claim 1.

By providing the device with said characterizing features, it is possible to treat intervertebral discs, preferably nucleus pulposus, in a lenient manner, i.e. without degenerating tissue outside the intervertebral disc and this treatment can be carried through non-invasively, which means that one does not have to insert foreign objects into the body and obviates thereby the risks and additional costs this might incur.

The invention will be further described below with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which

fig. 1 schematically illustrates a device according to the invention during treatment of an intervertebral disc, whereby a treatment table is shown in cross-section;

fig. 2 illustrates an enlarged part of the device of fig.

1;

fig. 3 schematically illustrates a treatment transducer forming part of the device of fig. 1 and its ultrasonic field during treatment of the intervertebral disc;

fig. 4 is a flow chart according to which the treatment of the intervertebral disc is carried through by means of the device according to the invention; and fig. 5 is a picture of an intervertebral disc treated with the device according to the invention.

The device illustrated in the drawings is intended for treatment of biological tissues in the form of intervertebral discs 1, preferably nucleus pulposus 1a. For this purpose, the device comprises a treatment transducer 2 which includes two ultrasonic transducers 3 and 4 (so called therapeutic transducers). These are arranged to each transmit an ultrasonic field 3a and 4a respectively, such that these meet to define a focal area 5. During treatment, said focal area 5 is located in the intervertebral disc 1, preferably nucleus pulposus 1a, to be treated for heating the tissue therein to such temperature that the tissue in the focal area 5 degenerates, whereby the pressure in the intervertebral disc 1 and thus, the pressure against the spinal cord 6, is reduced.

The ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 are provided to transmit ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a which to not heat biological tissue outside the focal area such that it degenerates. By using at least two ultrasonic transducers 3, 4, the ultrasound effect is distributed over larger areas and therefore, a lower power per transducer can be used. This results in that eventual heat increases in the skin are minimized for the power to be put in the intervertebral disc 1.

The power and frequency of the ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a, the temperature of the tissue in the focal area 5 and the transmitting time of the ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a may vary depending on various factors, but the frequency should lie within the range of 0,5 - 2,5 MHz, the temperature of the tissue in the focal area within the range of 45-80°C and the total transmitting time of the ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a within the interval of 5-60 minutes.

The ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 can be arranged to transmit ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a, the focal area 5 of which is adaptable relative to the space M between the end plates 7, 8 surrounded by the vertebrae 9, 10 and which surround the intervertebral disc 1, such that said focal area 5 can lie between the end plates 7, 8 without heating thereof to tissue-degenerating temperatures.

A focal area 5 with such adapted extension can be obtained by providing the ultrasonic transducers 3 and 4 respectively, with means 11, preferably in the form of transducer elements with concave spherical transducer surface. Hereby, a larger or better focussing is achieved and the focal area 5 can be given a substantially planar extension, as is shown in fig. 3.

The ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 may also include means 12 for, if required, displacing the focal area 5,

adapted preferably as mentioned to the space M between the end plates 7, 8, to the intervertebral disc 1, preferably nucleus pulposus 1a. These means 12 can be transducer elements of the phased array type.

For being able to locate to focal area 5 in the intervertebral disc 1, preferably nucleus pulposus 1a, it may sometimes - depending on the relative positions of the ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 and the intervertebral disc 1 - be advantageous or necessary to shrink or reduce the extension of one or both the ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a for avoiding heating of tissue outside the intervertebral disc 1 which may not be heated to tissue-degenerating temperatures. This can be achieved while the ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 have a plurality of means 12, preferably said transducers of phased array type, which momentarily can be deactivated or put out of operation for reducing the extension of the ultrasonic field 3a and/or 4a.

The ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 can preferably be located relative to the intervertebral disc 1 so that they transmit ultrasonic fields 3a and 4a which together define a focal area 5 with a substantially planar extension and which are situated substantially in parallel with and in a plane P wherein the intervertebral disc 1 is located.

The ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 can be arranged to transmit ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a with a focal area 5 the extension of which can be varied for adaptation to the size of the intervertebral disc 1 and/or nucleus pulposus 1a.

A diagnostic device 13 may include at least one ultrasonic transducer 14 which is provided, prior to the ultrasound treatment, to transmit an ultrasonic field 14a for registering the location of the intervertebral disc 1. The position of the ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 relative to the ultrasonic transducer 14 are also known and in this way, their positions relative to the intervertebral disc 1 can be determined. The ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 can be arranged to be controlled depending on information registered in the diagnostic device 13 regarding the current position of the intervertebral disc 1, preferably nucleus pulposus 1a, so that the focal area 5 is moved to coincide with the intervertebral disc 1, preferably nucleus pulposus 1a. The positions of the ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 can e.g. be controlled by changing their positions relative to their attachments. The control can be determined by a computer.

Said control of the ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 can be carried through by means of a control device 15 either automatically or by a surgeon marking on a screen (not shown) a point/an area in nucleus pulposus 1a in which the focal area 5 is desired. A computer (not shown) can determine the necessary parameters in the ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 such that the focal area 5 becomes correct.

A reading device 16 can be provided for registering displacements of the intervertebral disc 1 relative to the ultrasonic transducers 3 and 4 which occur when the

patient moves during treatment. A setting device 17 can be provided to automatically control the ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 to set so that the focal area 5 again will lie in the intervertebral disc 1, preferably nucleus pulposus 1a, after said displacement.

There might also be a non-invasive temperature-supervising device 18 for supervising the temperature in the intervertebral disc 1 during treatment. This temperature-supervising device 18 may cooperate with a control unit 19 which is provided to control the ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 such that undesired temperature changes in the intervertebral disc 1 are prevented during treatment.

The temperature-supervising device 18 may cooperate with the ultrasonic transducer 14 of the diagnostic device 13 for supervising or monitoring the temperature in the intervertebral disc 1 by means of ultrasound.

The ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 are preferably arranged obliquely behind the spine on opposite sides of the spinal cord 6, so that they can transmit their ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a in a direction beside said spinal cord 6 on opposite sides thereof and so that they meet in front thereof in order to together define the focal area 5 in the intervertebral disc 1, preferably nucleus pulposus 1a.

During treatment, a treatment table 20 can be used, which has a support surface 21 for the patient 22. This support surface 21 can be curved or settable into a curved shape such that the space M between the vertebrae 9, 10 at the intervertebral disc 1 to be treated, increases when the patient 22 rests with his or her back against said support surface 21.

The ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 and 14 can be mounted on a frame 23, whereby the mutual positions of said transducers 3, 4 and 14 can be known. Said frame 23 with the transducers 3, 4 and 14 is preferably displaceable relative to the treatment table 20 and the patient 22 for setting the transducers 3, 4 and 14 relative to an intervertebral disc 1, preferably nucleus pulposus 1a, to be treated, in a patient 22 on the treatment table 20.

To avoid disturbances of the ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a transmitted by said transducers 3, 4 and 14, a gasvoid liquid in a liquid container 24 can be located between the transducers and the adjacent skin of the patient 22.

Air between the transducers 3, 4 and 14, the liquid container 24 and adjacent skin can for the same purpose be removed by locating a gel 25 schematically illustrated with broken lines.

Treatment by means of the device described above is shown in the flow chart of fig. 4, whereby the diagnosis is already made, i.e. it is already determined which intervertebral disc 1 should be treated.

By means of the "ultrasound picture" obtained from the diagnostic device 13, the frame 23 and the patient 22 and eventually the ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 are oriented separately so that the angle of incidence of the therapeutic transducers 3, 4 is correct. Hereby, it is

achieved that the ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a of the ultrasonic transducers 3, 4 lie in the same plane P as the intervertebral disc 1 to be treated, and so that the therapeutic transducers 3, 4 are directed towards the patient 22 from behind. On the abovementioned screen, a point in the nucleus pulposus 1a is marked in which the focal area 5 (a so called movable focus which is displaced by means of the abovementioned means 12) for the therapeutic transducers 3, 4 shall be located. A computer then establish the requirements for the various transducer elements in the therapeutic transducers 3, 4. Eventually, adjacent bones can be marked as zones which the ultrasonic fields 3a, 4a are not allowed to reach.

Said computer may e.g. deactivate the transducer elements which are closest and reduces thereby the size of the ultrasonic field 3a or 4a in question. This reduction of the ultrasonic field 3a and/or 4a can be compensated with a longer treatment time and/or treatment effect. The "fixed focus" mentioned in the flow chart is the focal area obtained by means of the abovementioned means 11.

It should also be mentioned that instead of ultrasonic transducers, other therapeutic and/or diagnostic transducers, transmitters or applicators, e.g. transducers or transmitters of electromagnetic radiation, can be used in the device described above.

Drugs can be used in connection with and/or after treatment with the abovementioned device, namely pressure reducing/volume decreasing drugs, e.g. steroids or corticon™, and/or dehydrating drugs, e.g. impugan™, and/or antiinflammatory drugs, e.g. voltaren™.

By means of the pressure reducing/volume decreasing drugs, it is possible, in connection with and/or after treatment with ultrasound, to improve the pressure reduction/volume decrease in nucleus pulposus obtained thereby.

By means of the dehydrating drugs, it is possible to improve the removal of fluid from the treatment area in connection with and/or after treatment with ultrasound.

By means of said antiinflammatory drugs, it is possible to oppose inflammations in the treatment area in connection with and/or after treatment with ultrasound.

The invention is not limited to the device described above and illustrated in the drawings, but may vary within the scope of the following claims. Thus, the device may include more than one treatment transducer 2, there may be one, two or another suitable number of ultrasonic transducers and the diagnostic device 13 can operate with something else than ultrasound.

Instead of the patient 22 lying on his back on a treatment table 20, whereby the treatment equipment is situated beneath his or her back, the patient 22 and treatment equipment can be positioned otherwise. Thus, the patient 22 can e.g. be lying on his or her face and the treatment equipment be mounted on an arm permitting location thereof in a treatment position.

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Claims

1. Device for non-invasive treatment of biological tissue, whereby the treatment aim at changing or degenerating said tissue, characterized in

that a treatment transducer (2) comprises at least one ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) which is provided to treat intervertebral discs (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a), by means of ultrasound, whereby the ultrasonic field of the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) is focused in said intervertebral disc (1), preferably in nucleus pulposus (1a), for heating the tissue therein to such temperatures that the tissue in the focal area (5) degenerates, whereby the pressure in the intervertebral disc (1) and thus, the pressure against the spinal cord (6), is reduced.

2. Device according to claim 1, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) is provided to transmit an ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a) which does not heat biological tissue outside the focal area (5) such that it degenerates.
3. Device according to claim 1 or 2, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) is provided to transmit ultrasonic waves having a frequency of 0,5 - 2,5 MHz.
4. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducers (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) is provided to transmit an ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a) which in the focal area (5) heats the tissue to a temperature of 45-80°C.
5. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) is provided to transmit an ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a) which in the focal area (5) heats the tissue for a time period of 5-60 minutes per treatment.
6. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) is provided to transmit an ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a), the focal area (5) of which has an extension which is adaptable relative to the space (M) between end plates (7, 8) of the vertebrae (9, 10) surrounding the intervertebral disc (1) such that said focal area (5) can lie between said end plates (7, 8) without heating thereof to tissue-degenerating temperatures.
7. Device according to claim 6, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) has means (11) for transmitting an ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a) the focal area (5) of which has an extension

which is adaptable to said space (M) between the end plates (7, 8), and

that the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) further includes means (12) for displacing the focal area (5), adapted preferably as mentioned to the space (M) between the end plates (7, 8), to the intervertebral disc (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a).

8. Device according to claim 7, characterized in

that said means (11) in the treatment transducer (2) for transmitting an ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a) with a focal area (5) which is adaptable to the space (M) between the end plates (7, 8), includes transducer elements having concave spherical transducer surfaces, and that said means (12) in the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) for displacing the focal area (5), includes transducer elements of the phased array type.

9. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) have a plurality of means (12), preferably transducers of the phased array type, of which one or more can be deactivated or put out of operation for reducing the extension of the ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a) if required for preventing said ultrasonic field from heating biological tissues outside the intervertebral disc (1) to tissue-degenerating temperatures.

10. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) is located to transmit an ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a) with a focal area (5) with a substantially planar extension and which is situated substantially in parallel with and in a plane (P) wherein the intervertebral disc (1) is located.

11. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) is arranged to transmit an ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a) with a focal area (5) the extension of which is variable for adaptation to the size of the intervertebral disc (1) and/or nucleus pulposus (1a).

12. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in

that a non-invasive temperature-supervising device (18) is provided, preferably by means of ultrasound, to supervise the temperature in the intervertebral disc (1) during treatment, and

that a control unit is provided to control the ultrasonic transducers (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) such that undesired temperature changes in the intervertebral disc (1) are prevented.

13. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in

that a diagnostic device (13) is provided for registering the location of the intervertebral disc (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a), relative to the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2), and that the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) is arranged to be controlled depending on information registered in the diagnostic device (13) so that the focal area (5) of its ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a) is moved to coincide with the intervertebral disc (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a).

14. Device according to claim 13, characterized in that the diagnostic device (13) includes an ultrasonic transducer (14) which transmits an ultrasonic field for registering the location of the intervertebral disc (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a), relative to the treatment transducer (2).

15. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in

that a reading device (16) is provided for registering displacements of the intervertebral disc (1) relative to the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) which occur when the patient moves during treatment, and that a setting device (17) is provided to control the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) of the treatment transducer (2) to set so that the focal area (5) of the ultrasonic field (3a and/or 4a) will lie in the intervertebral disc (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a), after displacement thereof.

16. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that the treatment transducer (2) comprises at least two ultrasonic transducers (3, 4) which each transmit an ultrasonic field (3a and 4a respectively) which together define the focal area (5) wherein the tissue is heated to temperatures at which it degenerates, and which each separately does not have such high effect that they degenerate tissue outside the intervertebral disc (1).

17. Device according to claim 16, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducers (3, 4) forming part of the

treatment transducer (2) are located during treatment obliquely behind the spine on opposite sides of the spinal cord (6), so that they can transmit their ultrasonic fields (3a, 4a) in a forward direction past said spinal cord (6) on opposite sides thereof and so that they meet in front thereof in order to together define the focal area (5) in the intervertebral disc (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a).

18. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that a treatment table (20) for use during treatment of intervertebral discs (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a), has a support surface (21) which is curved or settable into a curved shape such that the space between the vertebrae (9, 10) at the intervertebral disc (1) to be treated, increases when the patient (22) is supported by said support surface (21).

19. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in

that the ultrasonic transducers (3, 4) of the treatment transducer (2) and a diagnostic device (13) having an ultrasonic transducer (14) are mounted on a frame (23) relative to a treatment table (20), whereby the mutual positions between said transducers (3, 4 and 14) are known, and

that the frame (23) is displaceable relative to a patient (22) for setting said transducers (3, 4 and 14) relative to an intervertebral disc (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a), of the patient (22).

20. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that the ultrasonic transducers (3, 4) of the treatment transducer (2) are separately controllable relative to their attachments.

21. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that between the ultrasonic transducers (3, 4) of the treatment transducer (2) and an ultrasonic transducer (14) in a diagnostic device (13) as well as adjacent skin of a patient (22) to be treated, there is provided a gasvoid liquid in a liquid container (24).

22. Device according to claim 21, characterized in that a gel (25) is provided for removing air between said transducers (3, 4 and 14) and the liquid container (24) as well as at adjacent skin.

23. Device according to any preceding claim, characterized in that other therapeutic and/or diagnostic transducers, transmitters or applicators, e.g. transducers or transmitters of electromagnetic radiation, are used in the device instead of the ultrasonic

transducers.

24. Use of pressure reducing/volume decreasing drugs, e.g. steroids or cortison™, and/or dehydrating drugs, e.g. impugan™, and/or antiinflammatory drugs, e.g. voltaren™, in connection with and/or after treatment of intervertebral discs with ultrasound.

25. Use according to claim 24 of said drug or drugs in connection with the treatment with ultrasound by focusing an ultrasonic field in an intervertebral disc (1), preferably in nucleus pulposus (1a), for heating the tissue therein to such temperatures that the tissue in the focal area (5) degenerates, whereby the pressure in the intervertebral disc (1) and thus, the pressure against the spinal cord (6), is reduced.

26. Use of pressure reducing/volume decreasing drugs, e.g. steroids or cortison™, and/or dehydrating drugs, e.g. impugan™, and/or antiinflammatory drugs, e.g. voltaren™, in connection with and/or after treatment of intervertebral discs with ultrasound by means of the device according to any of claims 1-22.

Fig. 1

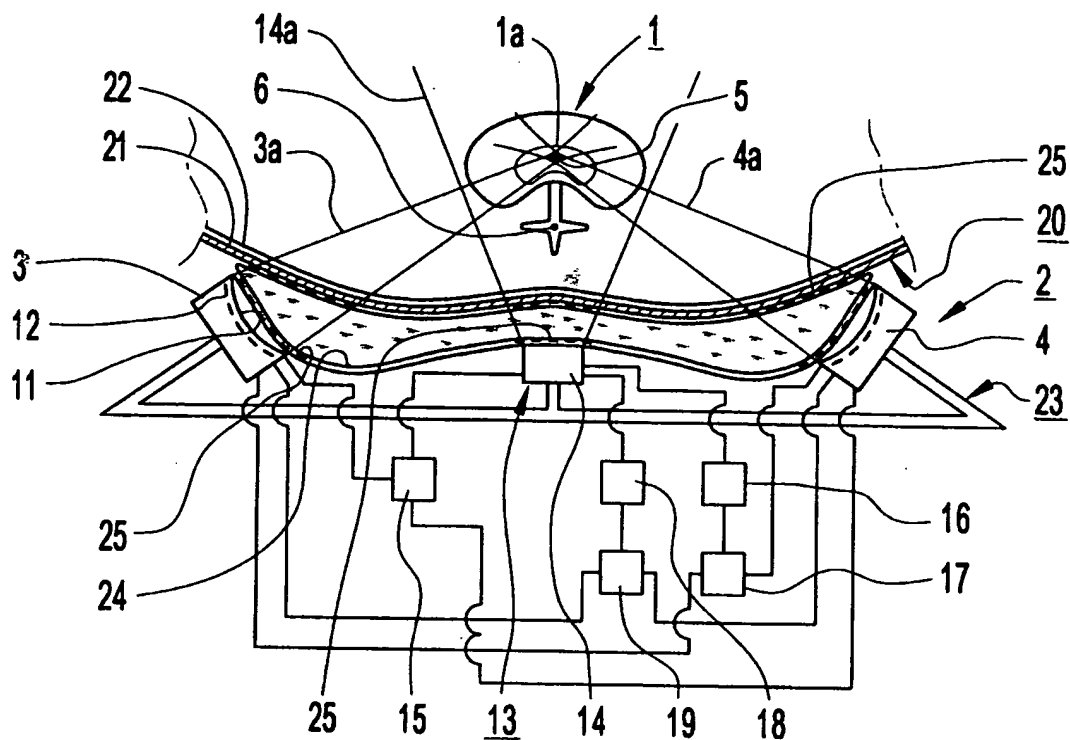


Fig. 3

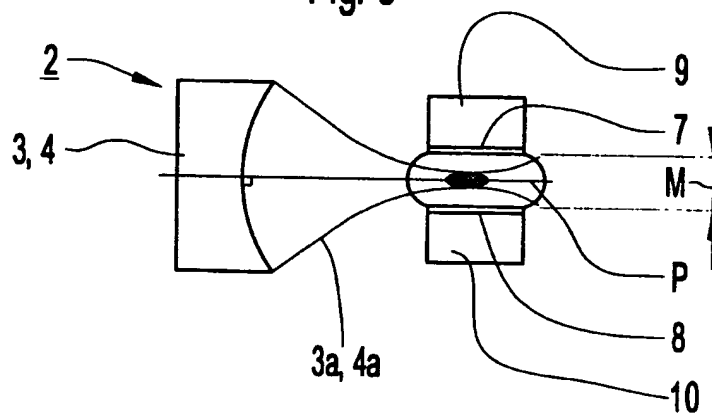


Fig. 2

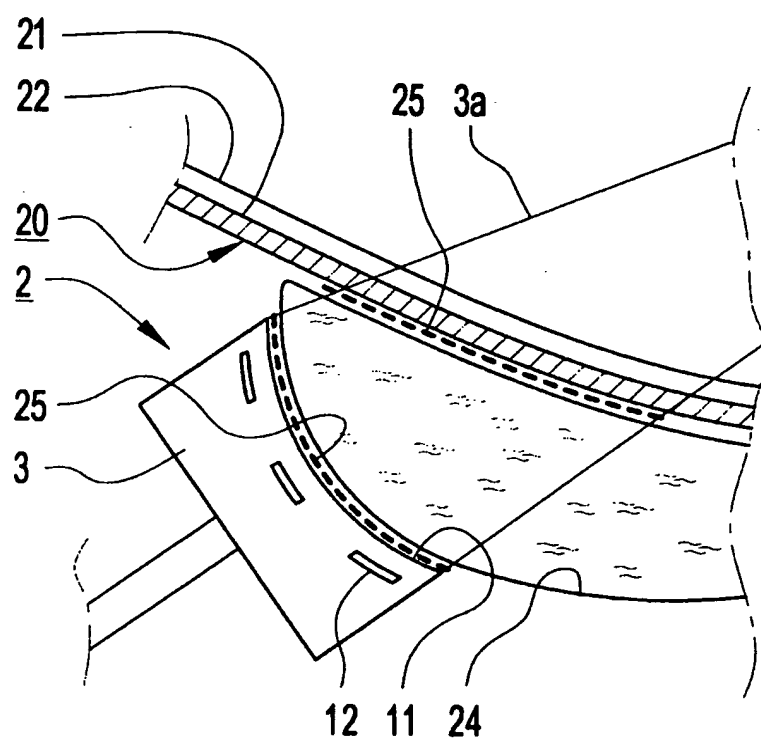


Fig. 4

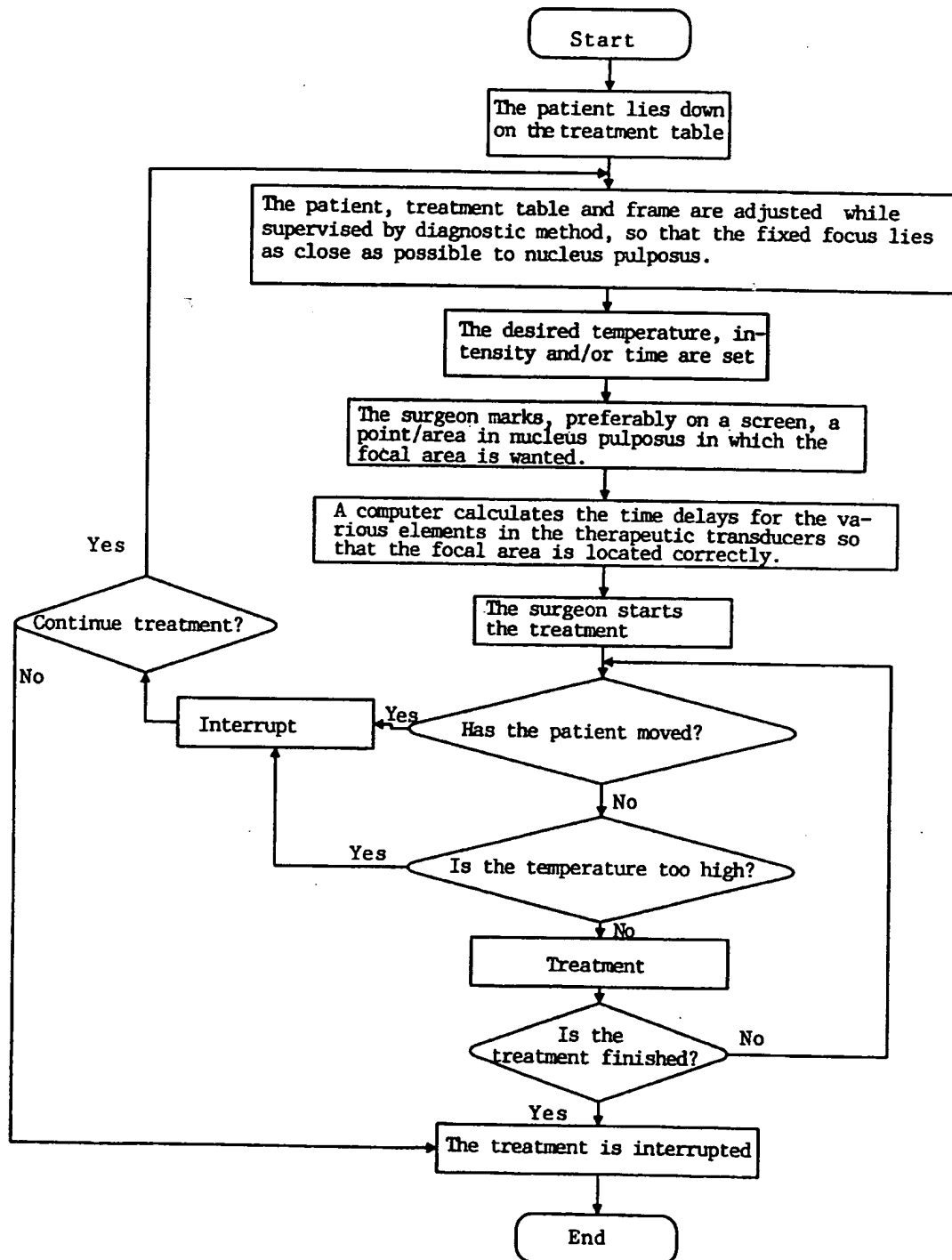


Fig. 5



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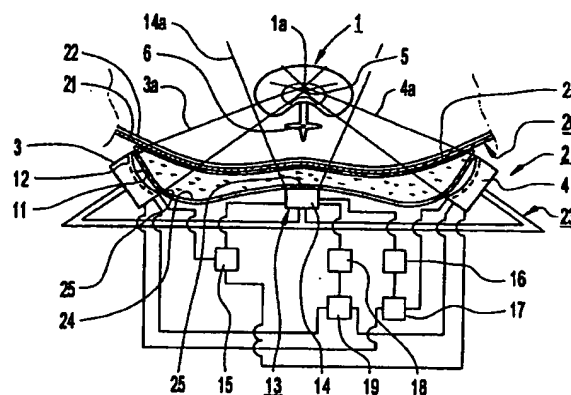
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(54) Device for non-invasive treatment of biological tissue

(57) The present invention relates to a device for non-invasive treatment of biological tissue, whereby the treatment aim at changing or degenerating said tissue. This device has a treatment transducer (2) comprising at least one ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) which is provided to treat intervertebral discs (1), preferably nucleus pulposus (1a), by means of ultrasound, whereby the ultrasonic field of the ultrasonic transducer (3 and/or 4) is focused in said intervertebral disc (1), preferably in nucleus pulposus (1a), for heating the tissue therein, to such temperatures that the tissue in the focal area (5) degenerates, whereby the pressure in the intervertebral disc (1) and thus, the pressure against the spinal cord (6) is reduced.

Fig 1



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Application Number

which under Rule 45 of the European Patent Convention shall be considered, for the purposes of subsequent proceedings, as the European search report

EP 98 10 6818

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Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
Y	WO 93 17646 A (SIEMENS AG) 16 September 1993 (1993-09-16)	1-5,7-9, 11-16, 20,21 6,10,19	A61N7/02
A	* page 8, line 26 - line 29; figure 1 * * page 10, line 18 - line 29; figure 2 * * page 19, line 13 - line 20; figure 4 * * page 25, line 1 - line 4 *		
Y	US 5 571 147 A (SLUIJTER MENNO E ET AL) 5 November 1996 (1996-11-05)	1-5,7-9, 11-16, 20,21	
	* column 2, line 44 - line 51; figure 1 *		
D,A	US 5 501 655 A (ROLT KENNETH D ET AL) 26 March 1996 (1996-03-26)	1-3,5-9, 11,16,17	
	* column 3, line 65 - column 4, line 14; figure 1 * * column 12, line 15 - line 21 *		
A	US 4 513 749 A (HUSSON DIDIER ET AL) 30 April 1985 (1985-04-30)	12	
	* column 4, line 19 - line 39; figure 3 *		
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INCOMPLETE SEARCH The Search Division considers that the present application, or one or more of its claims, does/do not comply with the EPC to such an extent that a meaningful search into the state of the art cannot be carried out, or can only be carried out partially, for these claims. Claims searched completely : Claims searched incompletely : Claims not searched : Reason for the limitation of the search: see sheet C			
Place of search		Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE		8 September 1999	Mayer, E
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

EPO FORM 1503 03/92 (Pct/CoT)



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EPO FORM 1533 03.82 (POMC10)



European Patent
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INCOMPLETE SEARCH
SHEET C

Application Number
EP 98 10 6818

Claim(s) searched completely:
1-22

Claim(s) not searched:
24-26

Reason for the limitation of the search (non-patentable invention(s)):

Article 52 (4) EPC - Method for treatment of the human or animal body by surgery

Further limitation of the search

Claim(s) searched incompletely:
23

Reason for the limitation of the search:

With the word "applicator", claim 23 relates to an undefined type of medical apparatus, which appears to include an extremely large number of possible devices, e.g. any type of medical device merely comprising 1 applicator. Therefore the claim contains so many options that a lack of clarity (and conciseness) within the meaning of Article 84 EPC arises to such an extent as to render a meaningful search of the claim impossible.

It is to be submitted that by disclaiming the electroacoustic transducers as specified in claim 1, claim 23 is actually an independent claim.

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

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This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82